

A choreographic notebook: Methodological developments in qualitative geographical research

Abstract

This paper develops the dancers' choreographic notebook as a cross-disciplinary documentary device in the representation and analysis of multi-sensual qualitative sources. Drawing upon fieldwork collected during a London-based research placement with the dance company BalletBoyz, I endeavour to extend critical debates around the body and performance within human geography to examine the 'more-than-representational'¹ methodological possibilities affiliated with performativity and its allied body of literature. In performing this methodological approach, I first hope to encourage experimental and creative documentary methods for conducting vibrant, engaging geographies of the body. Second, I affirm the centrality of sensuous, embodied accounts in the research process. Finally, this paper seeks to equip others in their investigations into re-imagining what 'physical' thinking might look like. In documenting the body, I hope a space may be created to rethink the ontology of the body beyond the dualisms of absence or present.

Keywords

Dance, ephemerality, experimental, methodology, non-representation, performance landscapes, time-space

Introduction: Overture

In this paper, I introduce the dancers' choreographic notebook² as an inter-disciplinary documentational method in the representation and analysis of multi-sensual qualitative sources. The methodological developments reported resulted from the first of three PhD research fieldwork sites (in London, Vancouver and Cape Town), investigating the role of the performing arts as a tool of contemporary resistance, resilience and reworking³ to acts of urban violence in historically disadvantaged communities. More specifically, this notebook materialised as a working practice during an ethnographic dance-based research placement with the British Contemporary dance company BalletBoyz and their continuing performative collaboration with Ethiopian artist-in-resident Addisu Demissie. Using the notebook as a tool for practicing performative research, I examine Demissie's Ethio-Contemporary choreography as a lens into thinking about urban precarity for Ethiopian street children and the disabled. Specifically, I enlist Demissie's *Stepback*, choreographed during October and November 2012 for the ten dancers of BalletBoyz, to contribute to the methodological debates of human geography and to examine the possibilities for conducting bodily-rich research. Building upon recent scholarship on performance⁴, and supported by a (re)turn to experimentation, I suggest that this methodological approach reflects the growing interest by geographers to incorporate 'practices normally deemed 'artistic', or more broadly as 'creative', into their methodological repertoires'⁵. While on the one hand the paper identifies the mounting interest in dance as a valuable object of

geographical enquiry (not least by McCormack, Nash, and Merriman), it on the other, suggests that despite such on-going research, there is scope for geographers to pay closer attention to the pragmatics, promise and problems of specific methodological approaches for doing dance research. It is through developing methods that attend to the dancing body within the choreographer's notebook that I work toward addressing this methodological gap. Simultaneously, in documenting corporeality, this paper renews debates about the ontology of the body, and proposes conceiving of the dancing body in terms of gradations of ephemerality.

Geographies of Performativity

The performative encounter between BalletBoyz and Demissie, as presented in this paper, is situated within a growing body of literature within human geography. This literature has sought to extend upon the theoretical and philosophical theories of dramaturgy, performance and performativity by Judith Butler⁶, Erving Goffman⁷, and Richard Schechner⁸, and the more recent theories of non-representation (NRT) by Nigel Thrift⁹. At first glance, the literature reveals an attentiveness toward bodily encounters with landscape¹⁰, performances and spectacles of cultural identities¹¹, an examination of dance and contact improvisation as *objects* of geographical study¹², as well as performative practices of resistance¹³. Geographies of performativity have further been complemented by a renewed interest in the vocabulary of experimentation¹⁴ as reflected by the 'in practice' section of Cultural Geographies. For Last¹⁵ these experimental geographies have confronted the margins of current conventions of

knowledge-making, and have sought new devices and methodologies that begin to meet the imperatives and complexities of different types of academic knowledge and dialogue. Developing out of a broader interest in art as a tool through which research is done¹⁶, geographers have turned to soundscape encounters¹⁷ and examined videographic geographies¹⁸. Concurrently, a more directed engagement with performance methodologies has evolved. For example, Latham¹⁹ has implemented a multi-sensual research diary of urban public spaces, whilst Macpherson and Bleasdale²⁰ drew upon text, photographs, mapping and artworks so as to creatively make the *process* of research present in the act of write-up. Rogers²¹ has enlisted linguistic analysis to examine how scripted performances are embodied and affective and thus offers an embodied account of language in performance. Drawing upon archival photographs and audio recordings, Enigbokan and Patchett²² have more recently experimented with the 'happenings' of experiencing and recreating conditions of trauma through a mobile artistic installation. Meanwhile, Pratt and Johnston²³ have played innovatively with processes of creative writing in the play *Nanay* to performatively engage with public debates in Canada around immigration policies and the transfer of care labour from the South to the global North. Finally, in researching dance, McCormack²⁴ and Rogers²⁵ have experimented with performance ethnography, and in turn provoked conversation around the value (as well as difficulties) in conducting interdisciplinary research. In moving into the realms of practice, geographers have succeeded in creating new spaces for rethinking relationships between people, landscape and place²⁶. However, an emphasis

on creativity has generated a potential 'gap' for geographers to further expand, in innovative and multi-sensual forms, the methods and diagrammatical practices by which mobile bodies are examined.

My enlistment of dance-oriented methodologies entwined with Social Science techniques (ethnography and semi-structured interviews), as discussed in this paper, emerged within the context of the studio. Essentially, it endeavoured to respond to the dialogical and processual nature of creating and refining choreography. More specifically, the notebook was concerned with tracing the embodied dialogues, tensions and conversations taking place within the studio. My aim here was to diagrammatically represent the multiple corporeal knowledge exchanges being negotiated in and through bodies coming together. In this way, I endeavoured to render visible the creative means of the choreographic *process* rather than focusing exclusively on the final polished *product*²⁷. In so doing, I argue that the choreographic notebook can attend to the inherent corporeality of dance practice. Second, I propose that in bringing dance-based methodologies into dialogue with geography's expanding methodological base, we can continue to invigorate experimental methodologies, whilst more specifically, provide the foundations for a working practice for studying dancing bodies. Third, the notebook emphasises recording the *process* and subsequent *afterlife* of choreography and the dancing body. Through attending to the traces of corporeality, the notebook can assist in developing debates about the body beyond claims of absolute ephemerality and in following Lepecki²⁸, return 'presence' to the body, culturally and historically²⁹.

Rather than motivated through a desire to be 'experimental' for experimentation sake, this paper contributes valuable insight into facilitating new ways of 'doing geographical research'. Through the very practice of documenting choreographic experimentation, this research takes geographical methodological scholarship beyond disciplinary traditions to engage with new forms of knowledge, spaces and cross-disciplinary audiences. This includes enlisting the dancing body *as* the instrument of research so as to invigorate a space for experimenting with multi-sensual embodied methodologies. Additionally, and without diminishing the importance and value of disciplinary-specific methods, this inter-disciplinary account works beyond the limitations of each disciplines methodological remit, to meet the needs of the corporeal and sensuous research being encountered. For Rogers³⁰, such inter-disciplinary research can push at the margins of 'conventional representational-oriented modes of enquiry, generating new rigorous practices for alternative forms of corporeal knowledge creation'. Arising from the notebook, I argue that whilst the 'essence' of a performance may ultimately be lost in the moment of its creation³¹, the traces and residue extending beyond the performance are very real and worthy of examination. This includes providing space for delving beneath the surface of a performance on an aesthetic level and examining the dancing body as existing *after* the moment of its creation – albeit transformed into a different corporeal (e.g. muscle memory) or documental (e.g. dance notation) format. Moreover, reflecting upon choreographic traces can offer valuable information into the social and historical framing of choreography, artistically and politically. That is to say,

exploring how dance and choreography operates as critical discourse. This includes examining the ways in which power, domination and inequalities are enacted, reproduced and resisted through performance, both shaping and in turn being shaped by the socio-political context of everyday life.

The Cast and Choreography

The methodological encounters recorded in the choreographic notebook resulted from ethnographic and performance observation with the BalletBoyz, and specifically through the choreography *Stepback*. Co-founded under artistic directors Michael Nunn and William Trevitt in 2001, BalletBoyz is an all-male London-based dance company engaging in an innovative blend of **Contemporary Ballet**. Since their reformation in 2011 with eight new dancers (and ten by 2012), branded *The Talent*, BalletBoyz have according to Londondance³² received international critical acclaim by 'thrilling audiences and dance critics alike with their exhilarating mix of award winning repertoire and high artistic standards'. However, my interest and subsequent research with the company emerged following their October 2011 collaborative tour to Addis Ababa to work with Ethiopia's community-outreach group, Adugna Community Dance Theatre, and subsequently one of its artistic directors, Addisu Demissie in London 2012. Adugna's origins can be traced to a 1996 experimental development project that took some 100 Addis street children to create the country's first Contemporary dance performance entitled *Carmina Burana*. Since then, Adugna's³³ mandate has evolved into a recognition of the need to 'feed the artistic

skills gained back into the community' and in turn, bring the value of dance as a medium of social change and personal empowerment to its marginalised slum dwellers.

As visiting artist-in-resident, Demissie's 'Ethio-Contemporary' choreography, interwoven with his corporeally engrained personal history of shoe shining on the capital's streets, provides a critical perspective onto an African cityscape that has been largely framed as a landscape shaped by poverty and marginalisation. Indeed, through his and Adugna's enlistment of dance as a tool of individual and community development, Demissie exposes the physical precarity of poverty and urban vulnerability of life for the estimated one million people living on the capital's streets³⁴ and confronts prevalent cultural trends that ostracise disenfranchised girls through early marriage³⁵. In so doing, the company has sought to rework and rescript notions of cultural identity³⁶ and empower young women through the medium of the performing arts. Additionally, through an ambitious outreach programme, initiated in 2000 with 11 young disabled dancers, called the Adugna Potentials, Demissie critiques and detangles the suspicion attached to debility triggered through disability (particularly loss of limbs from poliomyelitis) and HIV-AIDS in Ethiopia³⁷, and more significantly re-introduces them to forms of visibility from which many are excluded. Through a series of mixed-ability performances³⁸ (including *Talli* and *Lost in Perfection*), the company has explored how different types of bodies can support and sustain choreographic relationships, **dismantling** preconceived divisions between abled and disabled bodies and confronting what Plastow³⁹ outlines as 'socially engrained sense of uselessness'.

Accordingly, for Demissie, Adugna's mission remains one of societal development, for through the medium of dance Demissie seeks to re-present and actively embody through repertoire his city, socially, culturally and, in light of its atypical relationship with (British and Italian) colonial powers, historically. In this paper, I focus specifically on the choreography *Stepback*, to tease out the methodological accomplishments achieved through implementing the choreographic notebook.

Stepback, created for the BalletBoyz is a multi-purpose performance piece. First, the choreography creatively engages with societal perceptions of the 'deformed' bodily 'Other' as part of an educational attempt into facilitating greater tolerance and compassion toward those living with limited mobility. Second, it actively embodies a re-configuration of '(post)colonial' relationships at the body-scale through the fusion and embodiment of Western and Ethiopian dance traditions providing new insight into the ways in which postcolonial identities are corporeally performed. Finally, the repertoire advocates for Ethiopian culture by incorporating its rich local dance and instrumental traditions alongside choreography depicting the energy of everyday street life. However, *Stepback's* greatest success arguably lies in its politicised experimentation with conflicting themes. Notably, the repertoire juxtaposes community, friendship networks and support systems in contrast to raw poverty, physical violence and urban precarity. In embodying these divergent encounters, Demissie's dancers artistically express the multiple, often conflicting, experiences of inhabiting the city from the positionality of the disempowered and vulnerable.

Choreographically, the piece commences with the dancers forming a line across upstage with their backs to the audience. From here they stalk forward, traversing through the vertical plane in three groups before engaging in a series of sharp staccato sequences. As the piece develops, the choreography intensifies in tempo with the group functioning as a singular unit. Here the choreography fluctuates between elevated running steps evoking the Maasai image, and Contemporary-based floor work. The middle section sees *Stepback's* only solo, and a series of contact sequences that epitomise BalletBoyz's experimentation with dynamic lifts and support balances. In the remaining choreography Demissie re-engages with unison as the piece climaxes with full occupation of the space, escalating momentum portrayed through rhythmic elevated dynamism (jumps, hops, running steps), and a series of overlapping rhythms, evoking intensifying anxiety.

In combining Ethiopian and Contemporary techniques, *Stepback* can be interpreted as a collision travelling in-between Western and African socio-cultural traditions, sparking evocative discussions over identity, postcoloniality and appropriation⁴⁰. Most notably the repertoire incorporates the classical Western dance lineage of Ballet, Modern and Contemporary dance studied through five years of professional training by Demissie at Middlesex University sponsored by The Ethiopian Gemini Trust and Dance United. Second, the composition is a reflection of Demissie's cultural heritage and his rich 'mother-dance', traditional Ethiopian and Maasai dance, and a highly gestural pedestrianised

vocabulary recollecting his adolescence shoe shining on the streets of Addis Ababa. *Stepback* thus offers a rare opportunity to render visible the collision of bodies, techniques and vocabularies that materialised during this transnational collaborative project. More specifically, I was interested in teasing out and interrogating the mutable bodies and languages that emerged in the process of choreography through a device that bridges both the realms of performance, ethnochoreology (or the anthropology of dance⁴¹), and human geography; the choreographer's notebook. In so doing, I explored, critically and creatively, the value of the choreographic notebook as an interdisciplinary methodological device for the enhancement of qualitative, bodily-rich geographical research.

The Choreographic Notebook

Conceptually, I've been faced with the question over how to collect and document sensuous material in a manner that does justice to the performative and ethnochoreographic components of embodiment. Coupled with this methodological endeavour is an affiliated theoretical challenge connected to a particular way of knowing the body. In following on from Cartesian dualisms, this ontology of the body has been conceived in terms of disappearance. For Lepecki⁴², drawing upon Feuillet⁴³, this is positioned within the opposing philosophies of 'presence' and the 'body', and in turn, of the frictions existing between dance practice and written inscription. In *Of the Presence of the Body*, Lepecki traces this ontology to Jean-George Noverre⁴⁴. Writing in 1760, Noverre defines the dancing body's (in)materiality through the language of ephemerality; as that which cannot be fully grasped,

translated or notated. Continuing, Lepecki⁴⁵ argues 'movement disappears, it marks the passing of time. Movement is both sign and symptom that all presence is haunted by disappearance'. Extending such debates, Derrida's⁴⁶ more recent concept of the trace has been central to conceptualising the body's presence. Here, to speak of the body's presence is also to think of the attached non-meaning brought to mind, of that which it is not; that is to say of the body's absence. Thus, if the body lacks presence, or invokes an absence of presence, it becomes an 'always already absent present'⁴⁷.

Whilst in removing presence as the criterion for knowledge, Franko⁴⁸ and Phelan⁴⁹, have productively sought to write *with* ephemerality (not against it), I by contrast am seeking to write with ephemerality by challenging its finite categories. I am thus interested in thinking in terms of *gradations* of ephemerality. Consequently, whilst I recognise that a trace is that which is already following the moment of its appearance, I do not believe that this concurrently equates with disappearance. Rather I suggest by acknowledging the historical traces informing choreography and teasing out the legacies of performance that are both witnessed and un-witnessed, we can be more concise in defining what is being lost through performance and more specifically for who. By challenging ephemerality, a space may effectively be created to rethink how the body comes to be known, rendering geographers potentially better equipped to work *with* the elusiveness of the multi-sensual realms. Thus, in responding to Lorimer's⁵⁰ concern that much of the multi-sensual is lost over the passage of time, I

have sought to examine the complex interplay between embodied experiences and the formation of geographical knowledge through developing appropriate 'sources'.

Confronted with the limitations of bodily-oriented methodological fieldwork guidance currently available within the geographical literature (which overwhelming focus upon interviews, textual analysis and participant observation), conceptually, I built upon portfolio, lookbook and the artists' working sketchbook. Essentially, the artists' sketchbook acts as a visual history of the creative process following a 'finished' piece, and uncovers the ideas and intentions of the choreographer whilst exposing additional artistic influences during the process stages of creation. In addition, I sought inspiration through developments in documentation within the performing arts world. Here I worked with dance analyst William Forsythe's *Synchronous Objects for One Flat Thing, reproduced*⁵¹ which is an online database that draws on expertise and techniques from dance, geography and IT to re-imagine and visualise the dancing body⁵². Consisting of spatial data (physical locations) and attribute data (movement attributes and relationships), the *objects* created for Manning⁵³ map 'the co-constitutive spacetimes of experience and expression' taking place within choreography. In mapping three-dimensionally alignments between dancers, or creating movement density maps to illustrate spatial-temporal relationships, Forsythe's database takes the dance beyond choreographed 'stage-spaces' and creates forms of 'mobile architecture', which fold together events and space for future movement experimentation. Objects, for Forsythe thus create space through the environments they make

possible⁵⁴. Amalgamated, these diverse methodological lines of enquiry produced a series of innovative alternatives to the privileged written form and operated as experimental *additions* to the choreography. In exceeding the physical choreography, these objects critically sought to examine the afterlife of the dancing body and marked a step toward interpreting a dancers corporeality in terms of gradations of ephemerality. However, whilst Forsythe's database goes some way toward mapping the dancing body, there is further scope to develop and refine the objects created so as to account for the different experiences of embodiment, not least a disabled dance expression.

Comprising of elements of creativity and documentation, the choreographic notebook sought to attend to the numerous corporeal, textual, diagrammatical and pictorial constituents of documenting dancing bodies. Its implementation whilst in the studio relied heavily on an experimental approach, performance ethnography, and the duration of time spent within the field. The initial phase of production functioned much like the dance ethnographer's field journal, which Buckland⁵⁵ identifies as the means by which 'dance and human movement systems' come to be studied through fieldwork practice. Notably I incorporated notes and photographs of self-directed warm-ups, technique training in Ballet, Contemporary and release-based⁵⁶ Contemporary (and in which I participated), rest, refuelling and 'soft-stretching', and finally choreography and experimental embodied dialogues. Here I examined the art of choreographing, recording the act of being creative in the development of shapes and movement actions, the embellishment of time (through the use of rhythm, tempo and unison) and

space (through spatial relationships of placement, pathways and levels) and in experimenting with the underlying quality (both flow and force) of the piece. Alongside visual observations, aesthetic alterations expressed by Demissie, as well as the personal kinaesthetic sensations voiced by the dancers inhabiting the movements were collated. Although training and choreography was transmitted through the English spoken word, studio practice more commonly subscribed a dancer's lexicon; notably the balletic vocabulary of pliés and arabesques.

Additionally, my choreographic notebook of *Stepback* consisted of a variety of conventional and more experimental diagrammatical components. As shown in Figure 1, diagrams and sketches of particular movements (stick men performing certain alignments) and spatial relationships (positions of the dancers in the studio) were crudely sketched out, whilst experimental techniques such as symbols depicting orientation or cartographic representations of the pathways of sequences were gathered. Short four beat phrases were further diagrammed in a 'watered down' notational format; that is to say I simplified the score by focusing only on the legs or arms. This shorthand approach suited the fast pace of choreography, whilst the repetitive nature of learning repertoire ensured that it was possible to fill in blank spots, tweak or redraw these diagrams when the dancers returned to the opening phrase. Initially then, documentation was experimental and unselective as I sought to record as much I could see, hear and feel of the choreographic *process*. In attending to this inherent physicality of bodily practice and diagrammatically recording it within time and space, a step was taken toward

cartographically returning presence back onto the moving body. Subsequently, my notebook evolved to enable a re-mapping of the body in motion, allowing geographers the opportunity to prioritise qualities of creativity and corporeality during the investigative process⁵⁷.

(Insert Figure 1)

The second stage of the *notebook's* creation involved the development and refinement of each technique beyond the fieldwork setting so as to produce a sophisticated representation and analysis of the 'performance text'⁵⁸. Here, the notebook departed beyond a series of performance observations and evolved into a number of technical devices (I explore five) that analysed specific elements of the choreography; such as spatial occupation. In following Forsythe, I was concerned with creating a series of objects, which whilst documentations, also became creative layers of experimentation that added something to the physical dance and preserved its *presence*. I argue that such objects can assist geographers in writing *with* (rather than against) the corporeal realm and moreover challenge long-held dualisms of reason-emotion, mind-body, masculine-feminine⁵⁹. This includes emphasising diagrammatical or sensuous forms of communication (such as the relational nature of touch⁶⁰ and the material experiences of smell⁶¹) and prioritising the body without hyper-sexualising its physicality. Necessarily, the process of amalgamating the notebook built upon my own classical (Imperial Society of Teachers of Dance) training and academic performance learnings that have been evolving over the last twenty years. In the remainder of this paper I would like to address five components incorporated and examine how they transitioned from observations into creative objects that exemplified gradations

of ephemerality. They are notation, choreographic lineage, performance cartography, performance cues and the movement material index.

i.) Dance Notation

Writing on the critiques of Time Geography, Gren⁶² inverted the widely shared accusation that the field was too physical, and by contrast, claimed it was 'not physical enough' and consequently suggested that geographer's needed 'to develop new choreographies of the everyday by expanding new kinds of notation'. Developing upon such critiques, I turned to documentational practices within dance so as to attempt to accurately record human movement; notably notation. Thus throughout my London placement notational scores were created through combining ethnochoreographic notes (e.g. plié meaning to bend) with simplified notational scores (just arms or legs). Diagrams of stage locations and pathways were recorded later once movement phrases were perfected.

With the assistance of videography I was then able to diagrammatically reconstruct, using Adobe Illustrator, how the choreography and its performers developed in time and space. In enlisting videography alongside analogue forms of documentation, I was interested not so much in establishing a complete reproduction of the repertoire, but rather in exploring how it evolved into a digitisation of the choreography's afterlife. Whilst recognising the failure of digital technologies at getting completely at corporeality (often producing a detachment from its affective qualities), I simultaneously suggest

that videography reflects and reproduces the very ontology of the body being deployed here. Put somewhat differently, whilst through videography we **lose** some components of the dancing body, traces linger on, whilst more importantly, unexpected elements can be rendered visible, as shown through the subfield of videodance⁶³. In sum then, this 'tidying section' of creating notation necessitated reading across movement descriptions, spatial diagrams and videography, before transcribing it into a series of 16 barre notational scores. In this instance, I applied Labanotation because it remains the most widely enlisted dance documentation practice **worldwide**⁶⁴.

Pioneered through movement analyst and choreographer Rudolf von Laban (1879-1958), Labanotation is a series of symbols that amalgamated into the 'first comprehensive system of writing movement'⁶⁵. Building upon **previous** movement scripts, including ideographic principles of Beauchamp during the 1660s and the phonetic score of Feuillet in the 18th Century, Laban added the Pythagorean doctrine⁶⁶ of perfect geometrical bodies⁶⁷ to produce a series of basic principles that diagrammatically defined body parts, the direction of movement, movement duration, and dynamic quality three-dimensionally. Placing the central line vertically, Laban permitted movements occurring simultaneously to be recorded *besides each other*, demonstrating the body's symmetry as it transitioned between equilibrium and loss of equilibrium⁶⁸. Through this shorthand system, Laban engaged in an experimental attempt to expose the dynamic content inherent in movement and its progression, whilst **additionally** worked toward an analysis of dance in-between the expressive and the written format.

(Insert Figure 2: Left align) (Insert Figure 3: Right align)

Reproduced from my notebook is a simplified Labanotation score of a salient phrase performed by each of the dancers in unison within *Stepback*. As shown in Figure 2, the score is read from bottom to top and progresses linearly in reference to time with the accented black vertical line indicating the central line of the stationary body. The columns either side of the sternum refer to different body parts including the supporting leg, the working leg, and the torso. Evident from my reading of Figure 3 is the dominance of the Ethiopian style enmeshed with Contemporary components. Notably the phrase opens with a sharp dynamic shunt forward (see arrow) into a deep second position, flat-footed with the body heavily tilted forward, un-characteristic of the Western practice. However, within this single step, Demissie's balletic and Contemporary dance training is discernible through the 'port de bras' to couronne (curved arms above the head) position and the Contemporary Graham technique of tense angular fingers (choreographed into the repertoire as a result of her acute arthritis). Through analysing this score, it is possible to uncover the centrality of weightiness within Demissie's composition symbolised in the bow-shaped line which cross-sects on nine occasions horizontally through the staff. Attached, the cone-like symbols to the right convey a 'strong accent' to the movement phrase creating a forceful interaction between the foot and the ground. The use of self-created rhythm and contact with the earth confronts the Romantic Ballet ideology of ethereal suspension, whilst the concurrent usage of shoulder isolations during the final bar heightens the Ethiopian presence on the dancing body.

By detailing Labanotation I have been able to document in a written dance language, an evolving cartographic illustration of each of the dancer's roles in *Stepback*. Nevertheless practices of notation have come under productive criticism. Cresswell⁶⁹ identified how Étienne-Jules Marey attempts to abstract movement from the details of actual bodies provoked an image of movement as increasingly abstract or disembodied. Subsequently, a tension emerged between 'abstract motion and embodied mobility'. Laban consequently has been left open to critiques of failing to account for embodiment. Turning to lines however, McCormack⁷⁰ suggests this is not 'necessarily an abstraction that alienates movement from itself', or make it any less lived. Rather it 'may allow us to inhabit and experiment with making and remaking lived spaces in different ways'. Similarly, Merriman⁷¹ has engaged with Lawrence Halprin's notation system. Developing Laban's endeavours to notate spatial and temporal progressions, Merriman illustrates how Halprin's abstraction of landscape components, such as architectural features, into a series of symbols, resulted in a loss of much of 'the multi-sensory, kinaesthetic and sensational dimensions' of being in landscape.

The question of kinaesthesia, or a lack of, raises a pertinent question around disciplinary expertise, particularly when applied to comprehending Labanotation. Take the example of music. For the layperson, a music score could be considered unkinaesthetic through its absence of an aural dimension. By contrast an accomplished practitioner with pitch-perfect knowledge, would experience a

level of sensory engagement with this notational script through a knowledge of the sound those notes create. Returning to Labanotation, practitioners with disciplinary expertise could not only potentially visualise the movements being depicted, but moreover **gain** an embodied sensation of how that would feel; the stretch of an alignment or the sensation of supporting weight. Therefore, by working through the tensions existing in-between methodological practices and accompanying expertise, I suggest we can challenge how we approach knowledge formation, and readdress how that knowledge may be experienced differently. This has important implications for recognising what creative skills are needed if geographers are going to take dance-based methodological research further, **but more significantly, influence how we challenge dances' affiliation with ephemerality.** I therefore argue that the documentation of Labanotation can not only assist in archiving the complexities of non-verbal communication, but also facilitate experimentation with a body-centred language, in-between the embodied-written divide, **which Lepecki identified as responsible for the frictions existing between presence and absence.**

ii.) Choreographic Lineage and Cultural Collision

During the process of observation and reflection in the studio, sketches, photographs, and choreographic notes were documented within the notebook to delve beneath the surface of the choreography purely on a performance level, rendering the body historically and culturally attuned. Embedded within *Stepback* is an historical lineage of influences, inspirations and embodied learnings

transmitted kinaesthetically through the mentorship of demonstration, imitation, repetition and correction, alongside forms of cultural and community absorption from his rich Ethiopian heritage. These highly distinct influences, teased out within the notebook, have in the case of Demissie intersected and mutated to comprise a deeply individualised, hybrid embodied vocabulary⁷², spanning the realms of dance, music, forum theatre, and street gestures. Both geographically diverse and highly localised, Demissie's choreography is at a very basic level a collision, travelling in-between West and African. These disparate dance vocabularies of Euro-American dance practice and Ethiopian cultural traditions intersect and collide to form a characteristically personal expression that exceed the sum of the multi-disciplinary dance parts.

Demissie's *Stepback* further invites a cross-national dialogue through its incorporation of divergent, multi-cultural dance trainings and geo-politically diverse cultural traditions, with the effect of rendering the body 'hybrid' in so doing, producing a choreography that emphasises intersections or intermissions. This symbolic, yet bodily-rich, cultural meeting facilitates the overlapping of Ethiopian traditions with Contemporary Western discourses providing openings for engaging with new ways of experiencing and understanding bodily motion. Through detailing the disciplinary specificities within the notebook, I began to render visible this embodiment of bodily fusion. Indeed, for the BalletBoyz, the dance *process* itself necessitated the temporary re-programming of their own conscious and subconscious inclinations toward movement kinaesthetic, and contrarily embodying a 'foreign'

vocabulary which spotlights what Demissie self-identified as Ethiopian stylised body-pops and intensive isolations.

(Insert Figure 4: Left align of text)

In Figure 4, Andrea on the far right expresses the classical Western tradition; his right leg fully-turned-out in Ballets attitude derriere, his left foot extending onto demi-pointe (tip toes), his head ethereally tilted. In contrast to the soft elevated lightness of Andrea, our 'corps de ballet' stand aggressively (described in interviews as evoking notions of the African warrior) in a rooted deep left lunge, their body weight motioning forward, earthbound. Here an aspect of the Ethiopian dance tradition offers a competing aesthetic to the company's fluid and weightless signature pieces, evident as the group body-pop their upper torso, shoulders and neck forwards and then back with a slight back rotation to an irregular Ethiopian rhythm. Continuing, what makes the body pops 'Ethiopian' for Demissie is their rhythmic quality, which he beats out onto his chest (123, 123).

In this instance, the coming together of two disparate dance practices entails a process of encounter and negotiation⁷³ as Demissie crafts inter-culturalism onto the dancers bodies. Yet as Rogers elucidates, this concept of hybridity⁷⁴ (denoting fusion, border-crossing, and multiculturalism⁷⁵) risks interpreting cross-cultural meetings as harmonious integrations. Effectively, this not only downplays power relations embedded within cultural exchanges, but could reaffirm the history of encounter as that which occurs between the West and 'the rest'⁷⁶. In developing Bhabha's⁷⁷ concept of 'third space',

Gilbert and Lo⁷⁸ thus call for an appreciation of hybridity beyond 'simple fusion of differences but rather (as) a volatile interaction characterised by conflict'. Such tensions and embodied dialogues were at the heart of the choreographic **encounter**. Indeed while language barriers brought miscommunications, it was within dance practice specifically that the greatest dialogues emerged. Ethiopian based-rhythms had to be negotiated in response to the use of shifting tempos, whilst Demissie's non-linear approach to choreography brought tensions regarding how the overall structure of the repertoire would be realised. Third, the BalletBoyz lack of Ethiopian dance training meant that execution and aesthetic interpretation relied on embodied exchanges with the choreographer, whose physical practice (**see** Figure 4) became the primary means of transmitting a corporeal lexicon. Demissie's interweaving historical dance lineage thus sparked the creation of original movement, but more broadly initiated dialogues between Western ideologies that historically emphasise rigour and professional training and Ethiopian cultural traditions of remembered ways of carrying movement in our bodies. The bringing together of these dance forms effectively exemplifies how choreographic residencies are, to varying extents, always about a perpetual two-way process of hybrid subject formation. **Notably**, whilst Demissie's self-stylised Ethio-Contemporary form left **enduring** traces on the Boyz, the company simultaneously came to influence the working practice of the choreographer. Consequently, the success of the residency was founded upon a recognised need for tension, conflict and corporeal dialogues.

In attending to the forces driving choreography I reveal that far from fading into absence, they leave a corporeal presence within choreography, and in turn, come to inform the future practice of the dancers. By rendering visible the genealogy of repertoire and the historical dance influences that continue to find artistic form in the present, we can conceive of the body less in terms of disappearance, but rather as experiencing moments of re-appearance. Rephrased, a dancers corporeal training is far more complex and enduring then the language of ephemerality may lead us to believe. Second, and crucially for cross-cultural and postcolonial debates, through attending to Demissie's artistic lineage, it was possible to scrutinise the power relationships and trajectories informing the composition. Within *Stepback*, this was far more than West soliciting African forms, or indeed of a reversal of that encounter. Rather the choreographic process was co-creative, and sought to work with the multiple artistic inspirations within the studio. In exposing these complex networks we can therefore view the formation of corporeal knowledge as dialogical and processual. Applied to *Stepback*, this has important implications for indicating toward the performance of a postcoloniality (or postcolonial identity) in which a layering process of cultural identity emerges⁷⁹. More specifically through *Stepback*, the material legacies of colonisation on Demissie's performance practice are shown to be under a continuing process of constructive contestation, as he seeks to etch out a performance space in which both components of his Ethiopian and Western identities can coexist. In so doing, Demissie choreography internalises the on going lived negotiations that emerge through the colonial

experience, which, in the case of the BalletBoyz residency, are expressed as the necessary prerequisites to creativity.

iii.) Performance Cartography

Endeavouring to bridge the divide between human geography and the realms of performance, I solicited dances' inherent spatial-temporal components in order to cartographically re-imagine corporeality. Subsequently, I drew upon Kaeppler's⁸⁰ argument that dance results from creative processes, which manipulate human bodies in time and space⁸¹. Equally, I as others have shown, re-examined techniques within the disciplines history so as to depict bodies in various spacetimes. First, Merriman⁸² identifies how Hägerstrand's space-time diagrams significantly influenced NRT, setting the foundations for a process-oriented geography in which space, time and movement were intricately connected. Additionally, Latham⁸³ has examined how Time Geography's⁸⁴ cartographic representations of spacetimes can reanimate diagrammatical devices within performance geographies, enriching practices of mapping the everyday. Subsequently, Time Geography's attention to the 'choreography of the individual's existence', and its language of trajectories of movement as 'a weaving dance through time-space'⁸⁵ resonated with my enquiries into mapping dance.

Second, the relations between people and space, place and time attended to by Humanistic Geographers provoked similar questions. Rephrased, humanistic concern with examining everyday

patterns and practices, as played out through gestures, termed 'body-ballets, time-space routines and place-ballets'⁸⁶ illustrated shared themes and terminology for attending to the details of everyday dance practice. Sharing this concern, McCormack⁸⁷ has demonstrated how the current prevalence of a dance lexicon can trace its origins to the establishment of a distinctly choreographic vocabulary under Humanistic Geography. Third, following Tim Ingold⁸⁸, the concept of the line has offered a creative lens into experimenting with the performative connections between bodies, space and time. Connecting with such debates, Gerlach⁸⁹ proposes that 'cartographic lines perform. (...) In their unfolding effects and affects, lines are performative'. Through their in-between and transversal nature, McCormack⁹⁰ suggests that a line's experiential quality enables the possibility to narrow the divide between abstraction and experience. Indeed, in taking 'lines for a walk'⁹¹, we can conceive of them not as fixed points, but rather as performing an encounter, or existing as Manning⁹² contends, as lived abstractions. I was therefore concerned with how the performative characteristics of lines⁹³ and mapping can contribute to my concern with adding something to choreography. That is to say examining how the abstraction of a line becomes a technique of addition⁹⁴.

(Insert Figure 5: Right align of text)

Building upon this established geographical tradition alongside the more recent cultural turn, I produced a simplistic linear record of the inter-relationship between the dancers and their stage occupation. Soliciting Labanotation once again I diagrammatically tabularised the fluid transition between stage positioning's of each of the dancers and their relationship to time in order to create an

evolving map of the body in motion through space. As illustrated in Figure 5, this device provided for the re-representation of the progression of the dancers from downstage left into the complete occupation of the stage. In mapping the evolution of *Stepback*, duration and space were effectively intertwined, rendering a landscape of hot-spot activity visible; in this case downstage left. Additionally, movement patterns and anomalies became discernable. Notably, tabularising my findings reveals how for example Matthew spends the duration of the phrase in the left wing, progressing from downstage left, to centre left, to upstage left, before returning finally to his initial location. Whilst on the surface seen as a crude interpretation of stage occupation, this documentation enables us to explore areas of movement density and sparsity within the choreography and in turn challenge the focal and prominent location of the stage (traditionally centre stage in European performances), destabilising hierarchies entrenched within the ethos of the corps de ballet. Second, this rudimentary depiction etches subtly toward the significance of cultural differences within Ethiopian performances in which alternative values of space, performance roles (men often *share* dynamic and spatially domineering roles), and performance customs (the incorporation of drums, song and clapping) emerge.

The practice of documenting movement in space further assisted in generating a series of interconnected montages through integrating multi-disciplinary devices. Merging photographs, notation, stage orientation, and lines collectively I sought to render visible the architecture of flow. This was particularly useful when multiple dance phrases were occurring simultaneously that became too

intricate to transcribe in written form. Figure 6 maps the movement of the dancers from three parallel lines of different facings into a series of Contemporary dance-based lifts and floor motifs. The arrows here expose the direction of travel for this movement sequence into their ensuing position. Stage positioning and orientation combined with complex timing phrases highlights the company's emphasis on aesthetic patterning, reimagining masculinity and its relationship with dance (epitomising the ancient Greek heroes⁹⁵), and physical 'prowess' (not simply on display but active through lifts and jumps) entwined with intricate group cohesion.

(Insert Figure 6: Centre aligned)

iv.) Performance Cues and Networks of Embodied Knowledge

The highly innovative online dance database, *Synchronous Objects* by choreographer William Forsythe provided decisive vision for recording the relationship between the dancers during the choreographic process and the inter-connectivity necessary for a professional performance. More specifically, within his database, Forsythe endeavours to account for the shifting network of relationships within the choreography and render them immediately visible so as to illustrate toward the 'contrapuntal qualities in the choreographic system'⁹⁶. In the *Stepback* example, the sharp energetic Ethiopian-based components of the dance quickly revealed the prominence of intricate timing to ensure cohesion between the company members and in order to portray the artistic qualities central to Demissie's vision. Consequently, *Stepback* comprises of a highly structured and complex system of cues or

prompts. Defined as a visual or aural gesture eliciting a response by one or more dancers, these cues both complement the affiliated music score as well as exist beyond this framework, provoking a renewed understanding of the centrality of the dancers and the cue method of networking communication in determining the flow of the piece. The dancers reliance on such cues for transmitting information was rendered particularly prominent through one of the dancers use of exaggerated breath. Accompanying this aural (exhalation) yet also anatomical impulse (expansion of the rib cage) were a series of visual tactics that ensured the groups solidarity; examples included the person dancing front centre setting the timing, or an arm gesture in contact work initiating motion in the opposing dancer. Cues were simultaneously reflected in advice given by the instructor such as 'look to Taylor for your prompt', as well as observation of conversations between contact pairs who meticulously teased out whose movement initiated the next phrase.

(Insert Figure 7: Left align) (Insert Figure 8: Right align)

Figure 8 was initially composed in the choreographer's notebook within the fieldwork setting and was formed through a series of rudimentary sketches, which accentuated the flow of cues in-between the dancers. The initial implementation of the diagram consisted of sketching the dancers physical location, labelling them according to their initials and using arrow signs to signify relationships (figure 7). Transforming these crude diagrams into choreographic objects necessitated working between ethnographic notes and videography so as to refine and develop them into a cue score. This system of recording gestural and aural (predominantly breath) prompts, uncovers the rapidly fluctuating network

of relationships and the transmission of embodied, multi-sensuous (movement and sound) information between the dancers as they give (green/blue circles) and receive (white circles) cues across time. By making such prompts visible through graphical representation an overwhelmingly rich volume of corporeal information and interactions are translated into a clear and comprehensive score. Not only does Figure 8 reveal the levels of responsibility of cue givers within their sub-group (green arcs) but additionally their role in determining relationships between sub-groups and the entire company (blue arcs). Moreover, the notebook has enabled me to tease out substantial trends in gestural prompts. Notably, how Flavien, located centre-front (and visible to all) initiates the entire company on consecutive occasions. By sketching out cues, I have been able to collate substantial, often-unstudied, corporeal information that is, crucially, fashioned, exchanged and interpreted by the very act of bodily engagement between the dancers.

v.) Thematic Milieu and Movement Material Index

The final documentation process utilised in the notebook during my placement with the BalletBoyz amalgamated the themes and intentions behind the choreography, which in the case of Demissie were both highly visible and personally relevant to the repertoire. The centrality of theme (including abandonment, exclusion and poverty) and personal social experiences were solidified during a powerful solo within *Stepback*, instigated with a transition in music and the stage exit of all but one of the company members. Jordan, left abandoned on stage begins upon arguably the most expressive

and aesthetically unusual moment within the choreography, which unlike earlier sections that incorporated a rigorous Ethio-Contemporary technique, is highly narrative, as portrayed through pedestrian phrases such as begging gesticulations and enactments of self-harm.

In contrast with the above objects, this device worked alongside the soloist who was keen to verbalise the stages of despair to improve his own performativity. Thus during in-depth discussions with both the performer and choreographer, in addition to observation of the choreographic process (witnessing experimentation with different ways of begging for assistance), I sought to detail this narrative through key words and salient movement phrases in a series of tables in the notebook. This process was conducted alongside Jordan who identified eight choreographic themes; abandonment, begging, violence, seeking escape, exclusion, disregarded, enacting escape and acceptance. Through teasing out the themes influencing the process of creating choreography, it was possible to interrogate *Stepback* as a critique against urban insecurity. For Jordan, this solo had important educational value by informing the ways in which he understood, thought about, and connected to urban vulnerability.

Figure 9 which tabularises the eight sections from the solo illustrates the importance of thematic structure within Demissie's choreography, in so doing moving beyond the simple cataloguing of each individual movement and delving beneath the surface of the performance on an aesthetic level. More specifically, Jordan's bodily narration of abandonment, disability and violence, enacted a conscious

decision on the part of the choreography to experimentally engage with his own experiences of urban precarity. Violence is most notably evoked in section three wherein Jordan engages in three consecutive acts of self-harm, thumping his upper chest with force, 'leaving the torso to ricochet with the impact'. In portraying physical violence Demissie turns attention to the issue of police brutality against adolescents in Addis. Similarly, in section six and into section seven, Demissie introduces five dancers to the stage, who stand with their backs to Jordan. As the soloist engages in a series of crippling moves, with legs bent inwards and back warped and twisted, the group continue to dance unaware of his presence, in a structured balletic port-de-bras. By contrasting this self-controlled technique with the debility epitomised within Jordan's vocabulary, Demissie choreographically critiques the abandonment of the disabled by society and challenges their socio-spatial isolation in society (see Figure 10 on the use of contrasting levels).

(Insert Figure 9: Centre aligned)

(Insert Figure 10: Centre aligned)

The significance of this table is multi-faceted. Most simplistically, it provides the opportunity for detailed descriptions and analytical interpretations of a prominent section of the choreography as it progresses chronologically and thematically. For geographers, it further empowers the language *of* choreography and embodiment where in the past it remained absent or **under developed**. The thematic building block of Demissie's solo holds greater significance through its ability to critique specific socio-political conditions central to life on Addis Ababa's streets; including physical violence,

vulnerability and an insinuation of living with disability. In expressing these conditions through the practice of dance, human suffering is exposed in its raw form; that is to say at the scale of the body where these violence's are often enacted. For geographers, the embodiment of precarity and violence within the repertoire offers an educational tool for promoting understanding about difference or disability whilst questioning through which methods they are studied. For Jordan, the representation and embodiment of vulnerability functioned as a practice of knowledge creation. Indeed it was in embodying precarity that he was able to empathise with human suffering, and to find a choreographic language to make sense of it. Consequently, through the movement material index it is possible to reposition the value of dance in social practice, cultural awareness, and political action.

Conclusion

This paper introduced the dancers choreographic notebook as an inter-disciplinary documentary device in the representation and analysis of sensuous material collated during a research placement with dance company BalletBoyz and Ethiopian choreographer Addisu Demissie. By prioritising the performative components of the research, I sought to reflect and interpret upon the research process through a bodily-oriented perspective, in so doing extending upon methodological approaches within the discipline. Drawing inspiration from beyond geographical borders poses worthy questions, including the extreme disciplinary differences in methodological and theoretical expertise (not least the challenges of reading Labanotation by the untrained). Nevertheless, I argue that through searching for

spaces of mutual interest, I have contributed to developing rigorous practices for investigating the language of performativity, and experimented with inter-disciplinary diagrammatical avenues for analysing dancing bodies in space and time.

Second, working inter-disciplinarily provided theoretical openings for challenging an ontology of the body. More specifically, rather than viewing the notebook as an exclusively analytical tool, I sought to create a series of objects that functioned as experimental *additions to the choreography*. These objects (including notation, performance cartography, and cues) exposed the multiple ways in which the dancing body can be re-presented and undergo moments of re-appearance, both in future performances and in documentational format. That choreography has an afterlife, corporeally and representationally, takes a step toward my broader theoretical argument of conceiving of the dancing body as existing in-between presence and absence. Subsequently, by suggesting that our knowledge bases determine what we perceive as being lost over time (as in the case of Labanotation), I argue that we can begin to work with the limits of ephemerality, and rethink the body in terms of gradations of ephemerality. Moreover, the fundamental difficulties in securing corporeality for documentation can become the creative means by which the body's presence can linger on and in turn generate new spaces of possibility. Such potential spaces emerged through mapping performance cartography and the cue system. Yes, we may lose much of the individuality of performance and the expressive qualities of experiencing live performance, however that does not mean that the dancing body is either absent

or present. Rather it exists somewhere in-between, and thus the task is, in following Derrida⁹⁷, to find new possibilities for writing *with* the traces of performativity. The movement material index was one way in which I sought to address the frictions between written inscription and the dancing body. Additionally, I have demonstrated how choreography has a history, and is informed by ideas, political contexts and societal challenges. Meanwhile, turning to the choreographic lineage, I've argued that dancers absorb and retain movement experiences as they train in new techniques, whilst suggested that old forms are not simply replaced but become choreographic layers that co-inform future performative styles and repertoire content.

For geographers, this paper hopes to add to the literature in two ways. First, it has offered renewed attention to the study of qualitative methods by outlining performance-based methodological tools for investigating dance-based research in the furtherance of geographical enquiry. Given the disciplines growing emphasis on creativity, experimentation and practice this could assist others in examining what physical thinking might look like. Second, at the heart of the paper is an inter-disciplinary approach and it is thus hoped that the paper will support innovative cross-disciplinary research. I argue that such inter-disciplinary research should not be at the expense of disciplinary specific research, or solely for experimentation sake, but rather should meet the needs of the types of research being engaged with, and productively push at the boundaries of geographical scholarship in critical and creative ways.

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